

STRATEGIC RESEARCH THEMES

Application and Funding Guidelines (SP2022-2024)

Research Office

The University of the South Pacific

2022

1. Background

A key priority for the University (Priority Area 2), described in the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan, is *Research, Innovation & Partnerships*. PA 2 has the following strategic objectives:

- Objective 1. *Strengthen the University as the Pacific and International Hub for Research & Innovation;*
- Objective 2. *Enhance the role of the University as the Pacific Centre for Graduate Education and*
- Objective 3. *Internationalise the culture, engagement and impact of the University's research.*

To achieve these objectives, the University will fund project initiatives aligned with the following five Strategic Research Themes (SRTs)::

1. Sustainable, Inclusive and Equitable Economies;
2. Oceans & Climate Nexus;
3. Education, Culture, Health & Wellbeing;
4. Governance, Justice and Equality; and
5. Innovation, Empowerment and Sustainability.

This document outlines the types of projects that can be potentially funded and describes the process of application.

2. Eligibility and Application Process

a) Eligibility

1. Any research-active staff of USP can apply as Principal Investigator if at least one year of the contract remains; and
2. The projects are expected to have a team of leading researchers and early career researchers (Ph.D. within FIVE years). The man months of research workload for each team member of the project should be indicated in the final full proposal.

Note: The Principal Investigator can include Graduate Assistants, Masters and Ph.D. students to the SRT project, provided their research statements are relevant to the SRT, **but no scholarships will be provided.**

Application Process

A two-step review process will be adopted to optimize the evaluation of the SRT project

1. Submit a brief research concept of a maximum of two pages detailing: project title, brief background, research aim, objectives, deliverables, and indicative budget with final figures of the project (no breakdown needed); and
2. Applicants successful in Step 1 will be invited to submit a full proposal using the Project Proposal Template (**available on web link, xxxxx**) for final evaluation against the review criteria described in Section 3.

Note that project proposals might be sent for external review when expertise is required which is not available internally.

For further details about SRT, please refer to PA2 of SP2022-24, accessible on weblink: **xxxxx**

3. Proposal Selection/Review CRITERIA

The task of assessing SRT proposals is the responsibility of the Research Office. Under the responsibility of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (R&I), the SRT Selection Committee will be formed and proposals will be evaluated against the following criteria:

1.	The proposal should build upon established research evidenced by a strong publication record or innovative projects of the researcher team submitting the proposal. The project should align with one or more of the SRTs and indicate potential regional and international relevance.
2.	Evidence of effective project management and implementation.
3.	The project should have international collaboration evidenced by strong publications and citations, as appropriate to the discipline.
4.	Proposals with co-funding or external funding will be given preference. If the proposal is accepted, written commitments from collaborators will be required.
5.	A dissemination plan (including a publication plan that indicates quality academic outcomes) should be included, indicating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with which the outcomes are aligned.
6.	For applicants who had received previous SRT funding, evidence of successful completion and outcomes of those SRT projects will be required.

4. Project Monitoring: Progress and Completion Reports

1. Performance monitoring is a key pre-requisite in ensuring that projects are within the allocated budget and are implemented within the provided timeframe. For all SRT projects, the submitted proposal will serve as the basis of a Project Plan for assessing performance against agreed milestones and deliverables. The milestones are expected to mark significant events in the project and denote the completion of a phase of work and the time for review. The deliverables are tangible outputs that are created in the course of the SRT Project.
2. The Principal Investigators (PIs) will be required to submit progress reports every six months. All PIs are required to submit the project completion reports highlighting the main research outcome(s) and any impact of the project. The summary of the project completion report will be presented to the University Research Committee (URC) and the research outcome(s) of the project will be given full consideration for future SRT project applications from the project team.
3. Each SRT Project will be managed as a separate project with a specific budget allocation, financial and project milestones, and start and end date.

5. Budget Guidelines

1. The SRT projects are aimed to be carried out by the internal and collaborating team with the help of Research or Field Assistants, where required. SRT Grants will not fund any form of personnel costs or scholarships. However, the requirement for Research or Field Assistant, where applicable, will be considered.
2. Research Assistant (RA) and Field Assistant/Guide (FA/Guide) remuneration rates are illustrated in **Annexure I**. RAs will be appointed under a contract on the recommendation of the PI and the relevant Head of School (HoS). The FA/Guide can be paid F\$50 per day.
3. The projects with secured external funding from collaborators and/or industry will be given preference.
4. The SRT projects can cover research operating expenses directly related to the project, which generally include items such as laboratory and field consumables, materials, equipment and vehicle expenses for fieldwork, travel within the region etc.
5. To improve the USP citation record, the SRT Teams are encouraged to publish in high-rank journals and journals with open access. The external funding, if available in the SRT project, can be used; however, no SRT internal (USP) grant will be considered.
6. The SRT teams are encouraged to present the research output in international conferences that give an opportunity to publish in internationally ranked journals and in return create visibility to the university and SRT themes. Only external funding, if available in the SRT project, can be used for this purpose. Conference funding will be treated separately and not under SRT funding unless funded externally. SRT funding cannot be used for open source journals.
7. An amount of F\$300 per annum for literature collection can be requested for the duration of the project.
8. Computers or laptops can be approved under specific conditions, such as PC/Laptops necessary for continuous data recording or field trips. The laptops will have to be returned to the RO at the end of the project. These will have to be provided through the USP Information Technology Services (ITS).
9. A consultation with ITS and cost endorsement should be given to each item of the budget, specifically for equipment and consumables like specialized software, computers/laptops etc.,. For large equipment (> 10K FJD), it is essential to submit a quotation.
10. When required, field trips should be conducted cost-effectively using online options where possible with the help of Campus Directors.
11. Projects budgeted up to \$50K will be considered following the above guidelines. Proposals with insufficient details of the budget will not be considered.
12. SRT Projects are expected to be completed within 2-3 years of inception and target specific output(s) for future collaborations and external funding. Funding reports will be required before the following year's funding is released.
13. Applicants are requested to identify new funding sources and to clearly outline the links between the proposed SRT projects and any externally funded projects to clearly distinguish between existing and new work.
14. The Research Office will administer the funds by creating vote codes for SRTs and releasing funds.

SRT_Application_Funding_Guidelines_SP2022-2024

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Research Office: Research & Innovation

<https://research.usp.ac.fj/strategic-research-themes-2019-2024/>

The University of the South Pacific

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Annexure 1: Research Assistants and Field Assistants/Guide:

SCALES: Research Assistants (RA) and Field Assistants/Guide: Rates and Consultancy contract agreed with HR and Finance, 05 October 2021.

Research Assistants are expected to assist the research project as assigned by the Principal Investigator and team of the project. Academic qualifications and work experiences related to the field of research and experience with any specialized software or datasets are defined by Principal Investigator. The Field Assistants are expected to help the project team in collecting the data and are required only during the data collection phase of the project.

The field assistants/guides are only the part-time appointments on a daily, weekly or monthly basis and are paid F\$ 50 per day, and they assist only in the data collection phase of the project. RA could be both part-time or full-time normally for six months to a maximum of one year. While appointees in these positions may not be providing teaching support, they will be required to assist with scholarly research on a part-time or full-time basis and a lot more is expected from them in terms of delivering high-quality research outputs

Research Assistants (RA) can be appointed on a Full-time or Part-time basis. The full-time RA would be on a monthly salary of F\$ 1,100, 1,300, 1,500 and 2100 with UG, PGD, Masters and PhD qualifications, respectively, under consultancy contract modality.

Undergraduate students can be selected as Part-time RA and will be paid hourly based upon duties, experience and specialised knowledge as defined by the Principal Investigator. Undergraduates are generally paid within the Research Office’s current student pay schedule at a maximum of 20 hrs/week:

Level	Hourly Rate	Weekly	Fortnightly
1st Year	\$5	\$100	\$200
2nd Year	\$6	\$120	\$240
3rd Year	\$7	\$140	\$280

N.B. Undergraduates may be paid at higher rates (up to \$8 per hour) with an exception to pay approval based upon very high-level professional experience and assigned duties that require such high-level skills.

Graduate students can be selected as Part-time RA for high achievement and assist SRT researchers with scholarly research. They may or may not collaborate in the publication of research results as determined by supervising researchers of the SRT project. Postgraduates are generally paid within the Research Office’s current student pay schedule at a maximum of 20 hrs/week:

Title	Step	Hourly Rate	Weekly	Fortnightly	Experience
RA	1	\$9	\$180	\$360	UG degree with GPA of at least 3.0
RA	2	\$10	\$200	\$400	PG Diploma or four year UG degree GPA at least 3.0.
RA	3	\$12	\$240	\$480	Masters Degree and some relevant research experience.
RA	3	\$15	\$300	\$600	PhD Degree and some relevant research experience.

Key: RA (Research Assistant)